

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 000492

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKS PROTEST YASSIN'S DEATH, CONDEMN ISRAEL, U.S.

**¶11.** (u) Summary: Protesters burned Israeli and American flags at a symbolic funeral held for the former Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin following the noon prayer on Friday, March 26, in the Sultanahmet district, in central Istanbul. About 5,000 people participated in the demonstration organized by the Palestine's Friends Initiative, a group that includes some of Turkey's major Islamic NGOs. End Summary.

**¶12.** (u) Following the Friday noon prayer on March 26, a large group of about 5,000 people gathered in Sultanahmet Square to protest the death of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. The demonstration was planned by the Palestinian Friend's Initiative, a movement which includes some of Turkey's major Islamic NGOs, including Mazlum-Der, Ozgur-Der, Insan Vakfi, and the Association of Jurists.

**¶13.** (u) The organizers galvanized the crowd by hanging a Sheikh Yassin poster from one of the mosque's windows, distributing Palestinian flags, and shouting slogans, including "Sheikh Yassin, your way is our way," "Down with Israel," "Down with American Imperialism," and "Hail to Hamas, go on resisting." The mood of the crowd reached a frenzy when an effigy of Israeli PM Ariel Sharon and Israeli and American flags were set on fire. The demonstration was concluded with a funeral prayer for Yassin and speeches criticizing Israel and the US.

**¶14.** (u) The protest was held under the watchful eyes of a large riot squad from the Turkish National Police. The organizers were careful to warn the crowd to disperse peacefully and at no point did the police intervene.

**¶15.** (u) Comment: Islamists in Istanbul were quick to condemn Israel's actions, with many echoing Saadet Party leader Recai Kutan's remarks, "We once again see that the biggest terrorists are Israel and the US." This outrage was shared, to a certain extent, by many Istanbul residents across the political spectrum. Even Prime Minister Erdogan, perhaps motivated in part by the March 28 municipal elections, described Yassin's death as a "terrorist action."

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